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PREHISTORIC TIMES IN EGYPT AND PALESTINE.

BY SIR J. WILLIAM DAWSON.

I.

IT MAY be as well to confess at the outset that the subject of this paper is one which ordinary readers regard with suspicion. It raises many hard questions, is beset with difficulties and controversies, and trenches on the domain of those biblical and historical critics and archæologists whose work is apt to repel alike by its difficulty and uncertainty. I believe, however, that by a judicious mixture of geology, archæology, and history, sacred and secular, it may be possible to arrive at some certainty as to leading points. The greatest difficulty, perhaps, is in the choice of materials; for when we recall the huge mass of literature with which the subject has been illuminated or darkened, from the great folios of Bochart down to the very modern labors of Delitzsch, Maspero, Lenormant, Sayce, Wilson, Naville, Petrie, Conder, Tomkins, Pinches, Schrader, and a host of others, along with the large amount of geological, archæological, and topographical work added within recent years, the prospect is somewhat appalling. Still, by piling the whole together, we may hope with our modern "kodak" and magnesium flash to produce a little cabinet picture, which, if somewhat shaded in parts, may bring out the salient features of the oldest conditions of these old lands. I should, however, scarcely have ventured to attempt such a sketch but for the opportunity to apply personally the test of geological investigation to some of the crucial points, and thus to secure some elements of certainty, and for the further reason that I have just finished the revision, for a second edition, of a work in which these observations are recorded.*

*"Modern Science in Bible Lands," London, 1888 and 1891.

The term prehistoric was first used by my friend Sir Daniel Wilson in his "*Prehistoric Annals of Scotland*." It was intended to express "the whole period disclosed to us by archæological evidence as distinguished from what is known by written records." As Wilson himself reminds us, the term has no definite chronological significance, since historic records, properly so called, extend back in different places to very different times. With reference, for example, to the Chaldean and Hebrew peoples, if we take their written records as history, this extends back to the Deluge at least. Written history in Egypt reaches to 3,000 years before Christ, while in Britain it extends no farther than to the landing of Julius Cæsar, and in America to the first voyage of Columbus. In Palestine we possess written records back to the time of Abraham, but these relate mainly to the Hebrew people. Of the populations which preceded the Abrahamic immigration, those "*Canaanites who were already in the land*," we can scarcely be said to have history before the Exodus. In Egypt we have very early records of the dwellers on the Nile, but of the Arabian and African peoples whom they called Pun and Kesh, and the Asiatic peoples whom they knew as Cheta and Hyksos, we have till lately known little more than their names and the representations of them on Egyptian monuments. In both countries there may be unsounded depths of unwritten history before the first Egyptian dynasty, and before the Abrahamic clan crossed the Jordan.

What then in Egypt and Palestine may be regarded as prehistoric? I would answer: (1) The geographical and other conditions of these countries immediately before the advent of man. (2) The evidence which they afford of the existence, habits, and history of man in periods altogether antecedent to any written history, except such notes as we have in the Bible and elsewhere as to the so-called antediluvian world. (3) The facts gleaned by archæological evidence as to tribes known to us by no records of their own, but only by occasional notices in the history or monuments of other peoples. In Egypt and Palestine such peoples as the Hyksos, the Anakim, the Amalekites, the Hittites, and Amorites are of this kind, though contemporary with historic peoples.

Prehistoric annals may thus, in these countries, embrace a wide scope, and may introduce us to unexpected facts and questions respecting primitive humanity. I propose in the present paper to direct attention to some points which may be regarded

as definitely ascertained in so far as archæological evidence can give any certainty, though I cannot pretend in so limited a space to enter into details as to their evidence.

Before proceeding, I may refer by way of illustration to another instance brought into very prominent relief by the publication of Schuchardt's work on "*Schliemann's Excavations.*"

We all know how shadowy and unreal to our youthful minds were the Homeric stories of the heroic age of Greece, and our faith and certainty were not increased when we read in the works of learned German critics that the Homeric poems were composite productions of an age much later than that to which they were supposed to belong, and that their events were rather myths than history. How completely has all this been changed by the discoveries of Schliemann and his followers. Now we can stand on the very threshold over which Priam and Hector walked. We can see the jewels that may have adorned Helen or Andromache. We can see and handle the very double cap of Nestor, and can recognize the inlaid work of the shield of Achilles, and can walk in the halls of Agamemnon. Thus the old Homeric heroes become real men as those of our time, and we can understand their political and commercial relations with other old peoples before quite as shadowy. Recent discoveries in Egypt take us still further back. We now find that the "*Hanebu,*" who invaded Egypt in the days of the Hebrew patriarchs, were prehistoric Greeks, already civilized, and probably possessing letters ages before the date of the Trojan War. So it is with the Bible history, when we see the contemporary pictures of the Egyptian slaves toiling at their bricks, or when we stand in the presence of the mummy of Rameses II. and know that we look on the face of the Pharaoh who enslaved the Hebrews and from whose presence Moses fled.

Such discoveries give reality to history, and similar discoveries are daily carrying us back to old events, and to nations of whom there was no history whatever, and are making them like our daily friends and companions. A notable case is that of the children of Cheth, known to us only incidentally by a few members of the nation who came in contact with the early Hebrews. Suddenly we found that these people were the great and formidable Kheta or Khatti, who contended on equal terms with the Egyptians and Assyrians for the empire of Western Asia; and when we be-

gan to look for their remains, there appeared, one after another, stone monuments, seals and engraved objects, recording their form and their greatness, till the tables have quite been turned, and there is danger that we may attach too much importance to their agency in times of which we have scarcely any written history. Thus, just as the quarry and the mine reveal to us the fossil remains of animals and plants great in their time, but long since passed away, so do the spade and pick of the excavator constantly turn up for us the bones and the works of a fossil and prehistoric humanity.

Egypt may be said to have no prehistoric period, and our task with it will be limited to showing that its written history scarcely goes back as far as many Egyptologists suppose and confidently affirm, and that beyond this it has as yet afforded nothing. Egypt, in short, old though it seems, is really a new country. When its priests, according to Plato, taunted Solon with the newness of the Greeks and referred to the old western empire of Atlantis, they were probably trading on traditions of antediluvian times, which had no more relation to the actual history of the Egyptian people than to that of the Greeks.

The limestones and sandstones which bound the Nile Valley, sometimes rising in precipitous cliffs from the bank of the stream, sometimes receding for many miles beyond the edge of the green alluvial plain, are rocks formed in cretaceous and early tertiary times under the sea, when all Northern Africa and Western Asia were beneath the ocean. When raised from the sea-bed to form land, they were variously bent and fractured, and the Nile Valley occupies a rift or fault, which, lying between the hard ridges of the Arabian hills on the east and the more gentle elevations of the Nubian desert on the west, afforded an outlet for the waters of interior Africa and for the great floods which in the rainy season pour down from the mountains of Abyssinia.

This outlet has been available and has been in process of erosion by running water from a period long anterior to the advent of man, and with this early prehuman history belonging to the Miocene and Pliocene periods of geology we have no need to meddle, except to state that it was closed by a great subsidence, that of the Pleistocene or glacial period, when the land of North Africa and Western Asia was depressed several hundred feet, when Africa was separated from Asia, when the Nile Valley was

an arm of the sea, and when seashells were deposited on the rising grounds of Lower Egypt at a height of two hundred feet or more.* Such raised beaches are found not only in the Nile Valley but on the shores of the Red Sea, and, as we shall see, along the coast of Palestine; but, so far as known, no remains of man have been found in connection with them. This great depression must, however, geologically speaking, have been not much earlier than the advent of man, since in many parts of the world we find human remains in deposits of the next succeeding era.

This next period, that known to geologists as the Post-Glacial or early modern, was characterized by an entire change of physical conditions. The continents of the northern hemisphere were higher and wider than now. Great Britain was a part of the continent of Europe, the European land probably reaching out into the Atlantic to the 100-fathom line. The Mediterranean was divided into two basins, and a broad fringe of low land, now submerged, lay around its eastern end. This was the age of those early Palæolithic or Palæocosmic men whose remains are found in the caverns and gravels of Europe and Asia. What was the condition of Egypt at this time? The Nile must have been flowing in its valley; but there was probably a waterfall or cataract at Silsilis in Upper Egypt, and rapids lower down, and the alluvial plain was much less extensive than now and forest-clad, while the river seems to have been unable to reach the Mediterranean and to have turned abruptly eastward, discharging into a lake where the Isthmus of Suez now is, and probably running thence into the Red Sea, so that at this time the waters of the Nile approached very near to those of the Jordan, a fact which accounts for that similarity of their modern fauna which has been remarked by so many naturalists. I have myself collected in the deposits of this old lake near Ismailia fresh-water shells of kinds now living in the Upper Nile. If at this time men visited the Nile Valley, they must have been only a few bold hunters in search of game, and having their permanent homes on the Mediterranean plains now submerged.

If they left any remains we should find these in caverns or

* Hull, "Geology of Palestine and adjacent Districts," Palestine Exploration Fund. Dawson, "Modern Science in Bible Lands," p. 311 and Appendix. References will be found in these works to the labors of Fraas, Schweinfurth and others.

rock shelters, or in the old gravels belonging to this period which here and there project through the alluvial plain. At one of these places, Jebel Assart near Thebes, General Pitt Rivers has satisfied himself of the occurrence of flint chips which may have been of human workmanship; * but after a day's collecting at the spot, I failed to convince myself that the numerous flint flakes in the gravel were other than accidental fragments. If they really are flint knives they are older than the period we are now considering, and must be much older than the first dynasty of the Egyptian historic kings. † These gravels were indeed, in early Egyptian times, so consolidated that tombs were excavated in them. Independently of this case, I know of no trustworthy evidence of the residence of the earliest men in Egypt. Yet we know that at this time rude hunting tribes had spread themselves over Western Asia, and over Europe as far as the Atlantic, and were slaying the mammoth, the hairy rhinoceros, the wild horse, and other animals now extinct. They were the so-called "Palæolithic" or historically antediluvian men, belonging, like the animals they hunted, to extinct races, quite dissimilar physically from the historical Egyptians. I see, however, that in a recent review of Miss Edwards's charming work, "Pharaohs, Fellahs, and Explorers," she is taken to task by an eminent Egyptologist for statements similar to the above. On the evidence of two additional finds of flint implements *on the surface*, he affirms the existence of man in Egypt at a time when "the Arabian deserts were covered with verdure and intersected by numerous streams," that is, geologically speaking, in the early Pleistocene or Pliocene period, or even in the Miocene!

Singularly enough, therefore, Egypt is to the prehistoric analyst not an old country—less old indeed than France and England, in both of which we find evidence of the residence of the Palæolithic cave men of the mammoth age. Thus, when we go beyond local history into the prehistoric past, our judgment as to the relative age of countries may be strangely reversed.

It is true that in Egypt, as in most other countries, flint flakes, or other worked flints, are common on the surface and in the superficial soil; but there is no good evidence that they did not

* "Journal of Archæological Society," 1881. Haynes' "Journal of the American Academy of Sciences."

† Dawson, "Egypt and Syria," p. 149.

belong to historic times. A vivid light has been thrown on this point by Petrie's discovery in débris attributed to the age of the twelfth dynasty, or approximately that of the Hebrew patriarchs, of a wooden sickle of the ordinary shape, but armed with flint flakes serrated at their edges,* though the handle is beautifully curved in such a manner as to give a better and more convenient hold than with those now in use. This primitive implement presents to us the Egyptian farmer of that age reaping his fields of wheat and barley with implements similar to those of the Palæolithic men. No doubt at the same time he used a harrow armed with rude flints, and may have used flint flakes for cutting wood or for pointing his arrows. Yet he was a member of a civilized and highly-organized nation, which could execute great works of canalization and embankment, and could construct tombs and temples that have not since been surpassed. Can we doubt that the common people in Palestine and other neighboring countries were equally in the flint age, or be surprised that, somewhat later, Joshua used flint knives to circumcise the Israelites ?†

In accordance with all this, when we examine the tenants of the oldest Egyptian tombs, who are known to us by their sculptured statues and their carved and painted portraits, we find them to be the same with the Egyptians of historic times, and not very dissimilar from the modern Copts, and we also find that their arts and civilization were not very unlike those of comparatively late date.

There are, however, some points in which the early condition of even historic Egypt was different from the present or from anything recorded in written history.

I have elsewhere endeavored, with the aid of my friend Dr. Schweinfurth, to restore the appearance of the Nile Valley when first visited by man in the post-diluvial period. It was then probably densely wooded with forests similar to those in the modern Soudan, and must have swarmed with animal life in the air, on the land, and in the water, including many formidable and dangerous beasts. On the other hand, to a people derived from the Euphratean plains and accustomed to irrigation, it must have seemed a very Garden of the Lord in its fertility and resources.

There is good reason to credit the Egyptian traditions that the

* Kahem and Garoh, *Egyptian Exploration Fund publications*.

† Joshua, V., 2, marginal reading.

first colonists crossed over from the Red Sea and settled in the neighborhood of Abydos, and that they made their way thence to the northward, at a time when the Delta was yet a mere swamp,* and when they had slowly to extend their cultivation in Lower Egypt by diking and canals. If we ask when the first immigrants arrived, we are met by the most extravagantly varied estimates, derived mainly from attempts to deduce a chronology from the dynastic lists of Egyptian kings. That these are very uncertain, and in part duplicated, is now generally understood, but still there is a tendency to ask for a time far exceeding that for which we have any good warrant in authentic history elsewhere. Herodotus estimated the time necessary for the deposition of the mud of the Delta at 20,000 years; but if we assume that this deposit has been formed since the land approximately attained to its present level, allowing for some subsidence in the Delta in consequence of the weight of sediment, and estimating the average rate of deposition at one-fifteenth of an inch per annum, which is as low an amount as can probably be assumed, we shall have numbers ranging from 5,300 to about 7,000 years for the lapse of time since the Delta was a bay of the Mediterranean.

It is true that the recent borings in the Delta, under the officers of the British Engineers, have shown a great depth in some places without reaching the original bottom of the old bay. Some geologists have accordingly inferred from this a much greater age for the deposit than that above stated,* and in this they are in one respect justified; but they have to bear in mind that only the upper part of the material belongs to the modern period. A vast thickness is due to the Pleistocene and Pliocene ages when the Nile was cutting out its valley and depositing the excavated material in the sea at its mouth. A careful examination of the borings proves by their composition that this is actually the case.† Geologists who have been guided by these facts in their estimates of time have been taunted as affirming that a great diluvial catastrophe occurred while quiet government and civilized life were going on in Egypt. The evidence for this early date of Egyptian colonization of the Nile Valley is, as every one knows,

* "Herodotus," Book II., Ch. 15.

† Judd, "Report to Royal Society," 1885.

‡ "Modern Science in Bible Lands," where evidence of similar dates in other countries is stated.

doubtful, and it might be retorted that archæologists represent the Egyptian government as dating from a period when the Nile Valley was an inland district, and when the centres of human population must have been, principally at least, on lands now submerged.

As an example of the fanciful way in which this subject is sometimes treated, I may cite the fabulous antiquity attributed to the great sphinx of Gizeh. We are told that it is the most ancient monument in Egypt, antedating the pyramids, and belonging to the time of the mystic "Horshesu," or people of Horus, of Egyptian tradition. In one sense this is true, since the sphinx is merely an undisturbed mass of the Eocene limestone of the plateau. But its form must have been given to it after the surrounding limestone was quarried away by the builders of the pyramids, and consequently long after the founding of Memphis by the first Egyptian King Mena. The sphinx is, in short, a block of stone left by the quarrymen, and probably shaped by them as an appropriate monument to the workmen who died while the neighboring pyramids were being built. A similar monument of immensely greater antiquity, from a geological point of view, exists near Montreal in a huge boulder of Laurentian gneiss, placed on a pedestal by the workmen employed on the Victoria Bridge, in memory of immigrants who died of ship fever in the years when the bridge was being built.

It follows from all this that the monumental history of Egypt, extending to about 3,000 years before Christ, gives us the whole story of the country, unless some chance memorial of a population belonging to the post-glacial age should in future be found. There are, however, things in Egypt which illustrate prehistoric times in other countries, and some of these have lately thrown a new and strange light on the early history of Palestine and especially on the Bible history.

One of the kings of the eighteenth dynasty whose historical position was probably between the time of Joseph and that of Moses, Amunoph III., is believed to have married an Asiatic wife, and under her influence he and his successor, Amunoph IV. or Khu-en-Aten, seem to have swerved from the old polytheism of Egypt and introduced a new worship, that of Aten, a God visibly represented by the disk of the sun, and therefore in some sense identical with Ra, the chief god of Egypt; but there was something in this new worship offensive to the priests of Ra.

Perhaps it was regarded as a Semitic or Asiatic innovation, or led to the introduction of unpopular Semitic priests and officers. Amunoph IV. consequently abandoned the royal residence at Thebes, and established a new capital at a place now called Tel-el-Amarna, almost at the boundary of Upper and Lower Egypt, and from this place he ruled not only Egypt but a vast region in Western Asia which had been subjected to the Egyptian government in the reign of the third Amunoph. From these subject districts, extending from the frontiers of Egypt to Asia Minor on the north, and to the Euphrates on the east, came great numbers of despatches to the Pharaoh, and these were written not on papyrus or skin, but on tablets of clay hardened by baking, and the writing was not that of Egypt, but the arrow-head script of Chaldea, which seems at this time to have been the current writing throughout Western Asia.*

The scribes of the Egyptian king read these documents, answered them as directed by their master, docketed them and laid them up for reference; and, strange to say, a few years ago Arabs digging in the old mounds brought them to light, and we have before us, translated into English, a great number of letters written from cities of Palestine and its vicinity about a hundred years before the Exodus, and giving us word-pictures of the politics and conflicts of the Canaanites and Hittites and other peoples long before Joshua came in contact with them. Among other things in this correspondence we find remarkable confirmation of the sacred and political influence of Jerusalem, which the Bible presents to us in the widely separated stories of Melchisedec, King of Salem, in the time of Abraham, and of the suzerainty of Adonizedec, King of Jerusalem, in the time of Joshua.

At the time in question Jerusalem was ruled by a king or chief, subject to Egypt, but, as in the times of Abraham and Joshua, exercising some headship over neighboring cities. He complains of certain hostile peoples called *chabiri*, a name supposed by Zimme† to be equivalent to Ibrim or Hebrews, which to some may seem strange, as the Israelites were at this time in

* It is possible, however, that it may really have been a language of diplomacy merely, and may have been used by the Semitic agents of Amunoph as a cipher to communicate with the Egyptian court, and which could not be read by messengers or enemies acquainted only with Hittite or Egyptian hieroglyphics or with the Phœnician characters. For a similar case see II. Kings, xviii., 26.

† Inaugural Lecture, Halle, 1891.

Egypt. We must bear in mind, however, that according to the Bible the Israelites were not the only "children of Eber." The Edomites, Moabites, Ammonites, Ishmaelites, and Midianites were equally entitled to this name; and we know, from the second chapter of Deuteronomy, that these were warlike and intrusive peoples, who had, before the Exodus, dispossessed several native tribes, so that we do not wonder at the fact that the King of Jerusalem was suffering from their aggressions. It may be noted incidentally here, that this wide application of the term Hebrew accords with the one of the name *Aperiu* for Semitic peoples other than Israelites in Egypt.

We have here also a note on an obscure passage in the life of Moses, namely, his apparent want of acquaintance with the name Jehovah until revealed to him at Horeb.* Now, as reported in Exodus, Moses in that interview addressed God as "Adon," which is supposed to be the Hebrew equivalent of "Aten," the meaning being Lord. This is a curious incidental agreement with the prevalence of the Aten worship in Egypt, and shows that this name may have been currently used by the Israelites, whose God Moses himself calls Adon, till commanded to use the name Jehovah.

A second point of contact of Egypt and Palestine is in the painting and sculptures of hostile and conquered nations in Egyptian temples and tombs. These were evidently intended to be portraits, and an admirable series of them has been published by Mr. Petrie under a commission from the British Association for the Advancement of Science. By means of these excellent photographs, now before me, we can see for ourselves the physiognomy, and form of head, of the Amorite, Philistine, Hittite, and many other peoples previously known to us only by name and a few historical facts; and thus with their correspondence, as preserved in the Tel-el-Amarna tablets, and their pictures as given by Petrie, we have them before us much as we have the speeches and portraits of our contemporaries in the illustrated newspapers, and can venture to express some opinion as to their ethnic affinities and appearance, and can judge more accurately as to the familiar statements of the Bible respecting them. Lastly, Maspero and Tomkins have,

* Exodus III., 16 et seqq. This passage has been often misunderstood, but it certainly shows that the name Jehovah had become nearly obsolete among the Hebrews in Egypt, and that the name usually given to God was Adon or Aten.

with the aid of the names fixed by the survey of Western Palestine, revised the lists given by Thothmes III., in the temple of Karnak, of the places which this Egyptian Alexander had conquered ; and they have thus verified the Hebrew geography of the books of Joshua and Judges.

Another unexpected acquisition is the solution of the mystery which has enshrouded that mysterious people known as Hyksos or Shepherd kings, who invaded Egypt about the time of the Hebrew patriarchs, and, after keeping the Egyptians in subjection for centuries, were finally expelled by the predecessors of the Amunoph already referred to. They constitute a great feature in early Egyptian history, but disappear mysteriously, leaving no trace but a few sculptured heads, Turanian in aspect and markedly contrasting with those of the native Egyptians. It now appears that a people of Northern Syria and Mesopotamia, known to the Egyptians at a later time as Mitanni, and who were neighbors of and associated with the Northern Hittites, have the features of the Hyksos. It also seems from a letter in the Tel-el-Amarna tablets that they spoke a non-Semitic or Turanian language akin to that of the Hittites. Thus we have traced the Shepherd kings to their origin, and, curiously enough, Cushan-rish-athaim, who oppressed the Israelites in the days of Othniel, seems to represent a later inroad of the same people.

Such "restitutions of decayed intelligence" now meet us on every hand as the results of modern exploration ; and we must reserve for a second article some additional examples, as well as some further consideration of their bearing on biblical history.

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